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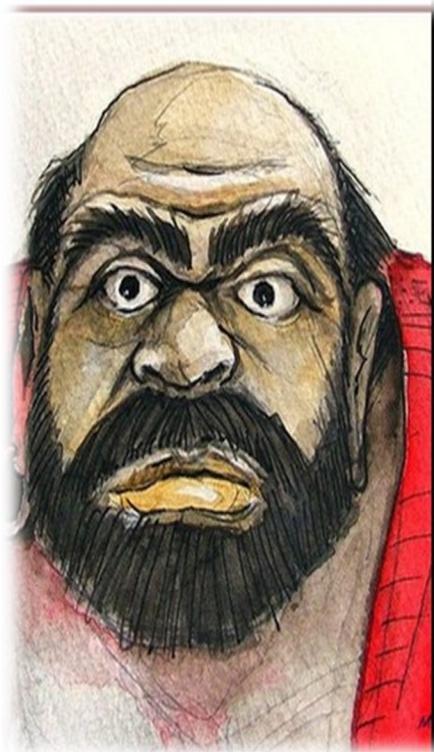
# Greatest Of All Times

**GLOBALLY SELECTED  
PERSONALITIES**

ISBN:978-81-984229-8-9

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C. 5-6 Century <:::><:::><:::> C. 5-6 Century



When you don't understand, you depend on reality. When you do understand, reality depends on you.

— Bodhidharma —

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**4<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> Century CE**



**Chan Buddhist**

**Kindly view these Videos, visiting the Web Links:**

**[01] A Monk : Bodhidharma : Documentary**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ThWUwIRXa6O> [1:02:24]

Bodhidharma was a Buddhist monk who lived during the 5th-6th century CE. He is traditionally credited as the transmitter of Ch'an (Sanskrit: Dhyāna, Japanese: Zen) to China, and regarded as its first Chinese patriarch. According to Chinese legend, he also began the physical training of the Shaolin monks that led to the creation of Shaolinquan. Little contemporary biographical information on Bodhidharma is extant, and subsequent accounts became layered with legend. The principle sources, given in various translations, vary on their account of Bodhidharma's origins. Two popular traditions exist regarding Bodhidharma's origins. An Indian tradition regards Bodhidharma to be the third son of a Tamil Pallava king from Kanchipuram, while the Japanese tradition regards Bodhidharma to be from Persia. The accounts also differ on the date of his arrival, with one early account claiming that he arrived during the Liú Sòng Dynasty (420--479) and later accounts dating his arrival to the Liáng Dynasty (502--557). Bodhidharma was primarily active in the lands of the Northern Wèi Dynasty (386--534). Modern scholarship dates him to about the early 5th century. Several stories about Bodhidharma have become popular legends, which are still being used in the Ch'an and Zen-tradition. Bodhidharma's teachings and practice centered on meditation and the Lankavatara Sutra.

The Anthology of the Patriarchal Hall (952) identifies Bodhidharma as the 28th Patriarch of Buddhism in an uninterrupted line that extends all the way back to the Buddha himself.

[02] Bodhidharma: Founder of Zen, from India to Shaolin

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKmcjzdjQWQ> [20:44]

Today's protagonist was born as a Prince in a southern Indian kingdom, but he soon discarded his palace life to embrace the study of Buddhism. As a travelling Master, he journeyed to China, where he gained powerful disciples and founded Dhyana Buddhism, better known in China as Chan, and later in Japan as Zen.

[03] Bodhidharma: The Mysterious Indian Prince Behind Kung-Fu and Zen

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jTlyyuptC6U> [14:23]

Bodhidharma is a fascinating historical figure -- his life is shrouded in mystery, and much of it has to be pieced together from a fragmented mix of sources, some contemporary, some written many centuries after his death in 528CE. However, there is no denying that he played a significant part in creating what we now know as "Kung Fu," and that he propagated Zen Buddhism in the East.

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## THE STORY OF BODHIDHARMA

<https://usashaolintemple.com/chanbuddhism-history/>

Shaolin monks and disciples follow a unique practice among Buddhists in that they greet each other using only their right hand. This greeting is a tradition which dates back to Da Mo and his disciple, Hui Ke.



Above: Bodhidharma crossing the Yangzi River on a reed. The reed's 5 branches represent the five Chan families. No matter which path you take, all lead to the flower at the end.

In 495 AD, the Indian monk Ba Tuo, or Buddhabhadra, came to China teaching a form of Buddhism known as Xiao Sheng Buddhism. He was given land at the foot of Shaoshi mountain by Emperor Shao Wen and founded the Shaolin Temple on this land.

Around the time that Ba Tuo was founding the Shaolin Temple there was an Indian prince named Bodhidharma. Bodhidharma was very intelligent and was the favorite son of the king of a region that is now part of southern India. Bodhidharma had two older brothers who feared that their father, the king, would pass them over and

bequeath the kingship to Bodhidharma. In their jealousy, the two older brothers often disparaged Bodhidharma while talking with their father, hoping to turn him against their younger brother. The older brothers also attempted to assassinate Bodhidharma but Bodhidharma had very good karma and so the attempts were not successful. Despite being the favorite son of the king, Bodhidharma realized that he was not interested in a life of politics. He chose instead to study with the famous Buddhist master Prajnata and become a Buddhist monk.

Bodhidharma trained with his master for many years. One day he asked his master, "Master, when you pass away, where should I go? What should I do?" His master replied that he should go to Zhen Dan, which was the name for China at that time. Years later, Bodhidharma's master passed away and Bodhidharma prepared to leave for China.

During the many years that Bodhidharma had studied as a monk, one of his older brothers had become king of India and that older brother's son had become king after him. The king of India was very fond of his uncle and wanted to make amends for the actions which Bodhidharma's older brothers had taken against him. He asked Bodhidharma to stay near the capital, where he could protect and care for him, but Bodhidharma knew that he must go to China as his master had said.

Seeing that Bodhidharma would not remain, the king of India ordered that carrier pigeons be sent to China with messages asking the people of China to take care of Bodhidharma. These messages made Bodhidharma famous among many Chinese

who wondered what was so special about this particular Buddhist monk that the king of India would make such a request.

In 527 AD, 32 years after Ba Tuo's founding of the Shaolin temple, Bodhidharma crossed through Guangdong province into China. In China, he was known as Da Mo. Da Mo arrived in China practicing Da Sheng (Mahayana) Buddhism. When Da Mo arrived, he was greeted by a large crowd of people who had heard of the famous Buddhist master and wished to hear him speak. Rather than speak, Da Mo sat down and began meditating. He meditated for many hours. Upon completing his meditation, Da Mo rose and walked away, saying nothing.

His actions had a profound effect upon his audience. Some people laughed, some cried, some were angry and some nodded their heads in understanding. Regardless of the emotion, everyone in the crowd had a reaction.

This incident made Da Mo even more famous, so famous that Emperor Wu heard of him. Emperor Wu, who ruled over the southern kingdom of China, invited Da Mo to come to his palace. When Da Mo arrived, Emperor Wu talked with Da Mo about Buddhism. The emperor had erected many statues and temples devoted to Buddhism. He had given much wealth to Buddhist temples. In talking of his accomplishments, Emperor Wu asked Da Mo if his actions were good. Da Mo replied that they were not. This response surprised Emperor Wu, but they continued talking and eventually Emperor Wu asked Da Mo if there was Buddha in this world. Da Mo replied that there was not.

Da Mo's replies were a reflection of Emperor Wu. By asking if his actions were good, Emperor Wu was searching for compliments and affirmation from Da Mo. Da Mo denied that Emperor Wu's actions were good because it is the duty of the emperor to care for his people. Rather than seeking compliments, Emperor Wu should have been content to help his people through Buddha. Similarly, if one asks if there is Buddha in the world, then one has already answered the question: Buddha is a matter of faith, you either believe in your heart or you do not. In questioning the existence of Buddha, Emperor Wu had demonstrated a lack of faith.

Da Mo's answers enraged Emperor Wu and he ordered Da Mo to leave his palace and never return. Da Mo simply smiled, turned and left.

Da Mo continued his journey, heading north, when he reached the city of Nanjing. In the city of Nanjing, there was a famous place called the Flower Rain Pavillion where many people gathered to speak and relax. There was a large crowd of people gathered in the Flower Rain Pavillion around a Buddhist monk, who was lecturing. This Buddhist monk was named Shen Guang.

Shen Guang had at one time been a famous general. He had killed many people in battle but one day realized that the people he had been killing had family and friends and that one day someone might come and kill him. This changed him and he decided to train as a Buddhist monk. Eventually, Shen Guang became a great speaker on Buddhism. As Da Mo neared the crowd, he listened to Shen Guang's speech. Sometimes Shen Guang would speak and Da Mo would nod his head, as if in agreement. Sometimes Shen Guang would speak and Da Mo would shake his head, as if in disagreement. As this continued, Shen Guang became very angry at the strange foreign monk who dared to disagree with him in front of this crowd. In anger, Shen Guang took the Buddhist beads from around his neck and flicked them at Da Mo. The beads struck Da Mo in his face, knocking out two of his front teeth. Da Mo immediately began bleeding. Shen Guang expected a confrontation; instead, Da Mo smiled, turned and walked away.

This reaction astounded Shen Guang, who began following after Da Mo.

Da Mo continued north until he reached the Yangzi river. Seated by the river there was an old woman with a large bundle of reeds next to her. Da Mo walked up to the old woman and asked her if he might have a reed. She replied that he might. Da Mo took a single reed, placed it upon the surface of the Yangzi river and stepped onto the reed. He was carried across the Yangzi river by the force of his chi. Seeing this, Shen Guang ran up to where the old woman sat and grabbed a handful of reeds without asking. He threw the reeds onto the Yangzi river and stepped onto them. The reeds sank beneath him and Shen Guang began drowning. The old woman saw his plight and took pity on Shen Guang, pulling him from the river. As Shen Guang lay on the ground coughing up river water, the old woman admonished him. She said that by not asking for her reeds before taking them, he had shown her disrespect and that by disrespecting her, Shen Guang had disrespected himself. The old woman also told Shen Guang that he had been searching for a master and that Da Mo, the man he was following, was that master. As she said this, the reeds which had sunk beneath Shen Guang rose again to the surface of the river and Shen Guang found



himself on the reeds being carried across the Yangzi river. He reached the other side and continued following after Da Mo.

There are many people who believe that the old woman by the river was a Bodhisattva who was helping Shen Guang to end the cycle of his samsara.

At this point, Da Mo was nearing the location of the Shaolin Temple. The Shaolin monks had heard of his approach and were gathered to meet him. When Da Mo arrived, the Shaolin monks greeted him and invited him to come stay at the temple. Da Mo did not reply but he went to a cave on a mountain behind the Shaolin Temple, sat down, and began meditating. In front of the Shaolin Temple, there are five mountains: Bell Mountain, Drum Mountain, Sword Mountain, Stamp Mountain and Flag Mountain. These mountains are named after the objects which their shape resembles. Behind the Shaolin Temple there are five "Breast Mountains" which are shaped like breasts. The cave in which Da Mo chose to meditate was on one of the Breast Mountains.

Da Mo sat facing a wall in the cave and meditated for nine years. During these nine years, Shen Guang stayed outside Da Mo's cave and acted as a bodyguard for Da Mo, ensuring that no harm came to Da Mo. Periodically Shen Guang would ask Da Mo to teach him, but Da Mo never responded to Shen Guang's requests. During these nine years the Shaolin monks would also periodically invite Da Mo to come down to the Temple, where he would be much more comfortable, but Da Mo never responded. After some time, Da Mo's concentration became so intense that his image was engraved into the stone of the wall before him.

Towards the end of the nine years, the Shaolin monks decided that they must do something more for Da Mo and so they made a special room for him. They called this room the Da Mo Ting. When this room was completed at the end of the nine years, the Shaolin monks invited Da Mo to come stay in the room. Da Mo did not respond but he stood up, walked down to the room, sat down, and immediately began meditating. Shen Guang followed Da Mo to the Shaolin temple and stood guard outside Da Mo's room. Da Mo meditated in his room for another four years.

Shen Guang would occasionally ask Da Mo to teach him, but Da Mo never responded.

At the end of the four-year period Shen Guang had been following Da Mo for thirteen years, but Da Mo had never said anything to Shen Guang. It was winter when the four-year period was ending and Shen Guang was standing in the snow outside the window to Da Mo's room. He was cold and became very angry. He picked up a large block of snow and ice and hurled it into Da Mo's room. The snow and ice made a loud noise as it broke inside Da Mo's room. This noise awoke Da Mo from his meditation and he looked at Shen Guang. In anger and frustration Shen Guang demanded to know when Da Mo would teach him.

Da Mo responded that he would teach Shen Guang when red snow fell from the sky. Hearing this, something inside Shen Guang's heart changed and he took the sword he carried from his belt and cut off his left arm. He held the severed arm above his head and whirled it around. The blood from the arm froze in the cold air and fell like red snow. Seeing this, Da Mo agreed to teach Shen Guang.

Da Mo took a monk's spade and went with Shen Guang to the Drum Mountain in front of Shaolin Temple. The Drum Mountain is so called because it is very flat on top. Da Mo's unspoken message to Shen Guang was that Shen Guang should flatten his heart, just like the surface of the Drum Mountain. On this Drum Mountain Da Mo dug a well. The water of this well was bitter. Da Mo then left Shen Guang on the Drum Mountain. For an entire year, Shen Guang used the bitter water of the well to take care of all of his needs. He used it to cook, to clean, to bathe, to do everything. At the end of the first year, Shen Guang went down to Da Mo and again asked Da Mo to teach him. Da Mo returned with Shen Guang to the Drum Mountain and dug a second well. The water of this well was spicy. For an entire year, Shen Guang used the spicy water for all of his needs. At the end of the second year, Shen Guang went back down to Da Mo and asked again to be taught. Da Mo dug a third well on the Drum Mountain. The water of this third well was sour. For the third year, Shen Guang used the sour water for all of his needs. At the end of the third year, Shen Guang returned to Da Mo and again asked to be taught. Da Mo returned to the Drum Mountain and dug a fourth and final well. The water of this well was sweet. At this point, Shen Guang realized that the four wells represented his life. Like the wells, his life would sometimes be bitter, sometimes sour, sometimes spicy and sometimes sweet. Each of these phases in his life was equally beautiful and necessary, just as

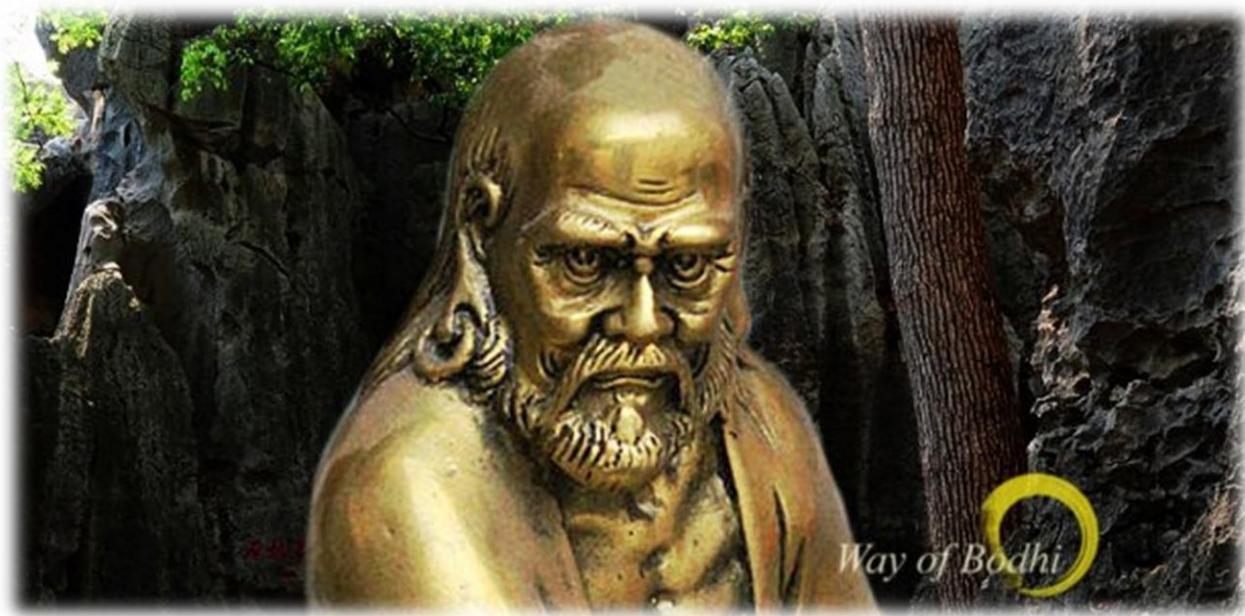
each of the four seasons of the year is beautiful and necessary in its own way. Without really saying many words to Shen Guang, Da Mo had taught Shen Guang the most important of lessons in a mind-to-mind, heart-to-heart fashion. This mind-to-mind, heart-to-heart communication is called “action language” and is the foundation of the Chan Buddhism which Da Mo began at the Shaolin Temple.

After his realization, Shen Guang was given the name Hui Ke and he became abbot of the Shaolin temple after Da Mo.



## Transcending Movement and Stillness The Life of Bodhidharma

<https://www.wayofbodhi.org/bodhidharma-lifestory/>



This first part of the trilogy on Bodhidharma narrates the life story of Bodhidharma. As various incidents unfolded during Bodhidharma's travels in China, they also gave rise to various paradoxical expressions that generations of disciples reflected upon to gain insight into reality.

Around 5th-6th Century AD in China, the Emperor Wu was getting ready to meet the great Indian Buddhist master Bodhidharma. The Master had already arrived in China and the stories of various encounters people had with him were spreading like the wind. In fact, even before that, carrier pigeons sent by the Pallava king of South India had also reached there announcing the imminent arrival of the Master. So, people in anticipation flocked to the Monastery where Bodhidharma was invited to give a teaching. Most of them were quite perplexed to see the Master's style of teaching. It did not fit into anything that they know so

far. This news promptly reached the Emperor, filling his mind with eagerness to meet the Master.

## The Hollow Merit of the Pious Emperor

This Emperor was an avid practitioner of Mahayana Buddhism. He supported the monastic Sangha generously, built many Temples and Stupas, promoted vegetarianism and banned the sacrifice of animals and capital punishment. Due to his ardent support for the Buddhist causes he came to be known as the 'Bodhisattva Emperor'.

*Upon meeting Bodhidharma, the Emperor recounted his own great deeds and asked, "Having done all these, how much merit do I have?". Bodhidharma replied, "None".*

*The pious Emperor was least expecting such an answer and was taken aback. He further asked, "What is the first principle of the holy teachings?" Bodhidharma replied: "Vast emptiness, nothing holy".*

*Bewildered, the Emperor continued, "Who is standing before me then?". Bodhidharma said, "I don't know".*



**Emperor Wu of Liang.**

This conversation became famous as one of the first recorded Koans (an often paradoxical anecdote or riddle, that is used to provoke the disciple into deep introspection and to break down his/her frames of reference) in Chan/Zen Buddhism. Here, Bodhidharma was trying to cut across the Emperor's clinging to 'spiritual materialism' and introduce him to the uncompounded nature of reality. The Emperor was sincerely trying to practice Buddhism as he knew it. Yet he was

doing all that with the sense of 'I am', the very root of delusion that every practice of Buddhism is supposed to overcome. Though he was performing many virtuous acts, it was just going towards reinforcing his sense of 'I am', entangling him further and further in Samsara. With all those generous acts done with a sense of 'I', at best, he could gain a 'nicer' Samsara, but could not move even an iota closer to Nirvana (liberation).

For the second question of the Emperor, the Master's response points out that there is nothing to cling on to as holy. And that is what makes everything holy. This is because clinging is at the very root of unholiness.

The response to the third question was supposed to shatter the very clinging to 'I am'. Indeed there is nothing to know and cling on to as "I am". Of course, Bodhidharma knows very well that he is a Buddhist master who travelled from India, who is now in China, meeting the Emperor and so on. Yet his form and thoughts are coming and going like water in a river. Nothing stays as the true Bodhidharma. In all that comes and goes there is nothing to point and say, "This is Bodhidharma".

The Emperor was a truly virtuous person, but he needed to let go of his clinging to 'I am'. Anyway, the Emperor didn't get that message and the Master moved on with his journey to the north of China. It is said that later the Emperor realized the greatness of Bodhidharma. Later, upon hearing about the Master's death, he made the following inscription in tribute to the Master,

**Alas! I saw him without seeing him;  
I met him without meeting him;  
I encountered him without encountering him;  
Now as before I regret this deeply!**

***Who was Bodhidharma ?***



Bodhidharma (known as Damo/Pútídámó in China and Daruma /Bodaídaruma in Japan) is well known throughout East Asia and in modern times in the West as the founding master of Chan/Zen Buddhism (dhyāna in Sanskrit). But here in India, his homeland, people hardly know anything about him other than as an esoteric figure who went to China. They especially think of him as a Buddhist monk from South India with mastery in medicine and martial arts. Maybe they learnt this much from the Indians who went on to learn Kungfu and Karate. But in general, people in India are not aware about his background, his realization, his relevance or about his contributions in China. So let us look into Bodhidharma's life story and teachings as well as the rich wisdom heritage of South India that led to the molding of this great master.

### South India during Bodhidharma's time



Pallava Kingdom – Bodhidharma was born as a prince here.

South India was a cradle of Mahayana Buddhism where it thrived for many centuries. The progenitor of Mahayana as a movement, the great Acharya Nagarjuna himself was from the South and so were many of the other great Panditas and Siddhas of Mahayana. Kanchi and Vanchi were renowned Buddhist centers of learning in the South for many centuries (though not well organized in the lines of major Buddhist universities of the North such as Nalanda and Vikramasila). Further, the neighboring forests of Sriparvata and Potalaka were the abodes of choice for many Buddhist Mahasiddhas and Yogis. It was into this milieu that Bodhidharma was born as the third son of the Pallava King Simhavarman II. The prince was then known as Bodhyottara (pronounced as Bodhitara in Chinese sources).

The Pallava kingdom (275 CE to 897 CE) spanned across areas corresponding to the present day Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra/Telangana. Their capital was at Kanchi (present day Kanchipuram). Kanchi was the birth place of many eminent Buddhist masters. The Theravada commentator Buddhaghosha (5th century CE) and the Buddhist logician Dignaga (5th/ 6th century CE) were from Kanchi. Xuanzang (Hsüan tsang), the Chinese monk traveler who visited India roughly 100 years after Bodhidharma recorded hundreds of Mahayana monasteries and 10,000 monks in Kanchi. When Xuanzang studied at Nalanda, his Guru was Acharya Dharmapala, the then Abbot of Nalanda and a well-known commentator of Yogacara Buddhism. Dharmapala was also from Kanchi.

### **The White Lotus Comes to Damo - The Lineage**

Bodhyotara's father, the King was interested in Dharma and received teachings from the Buddhist master Prajnottara (pronounced as Prajnatara in Chinese sources). He also arranged for his three sons to be trained by Prajnottara. During the course of the training, Prajnottara saw that the youngest prince Bodhyottara had deep interest and wisdom. Though he realized Bodhyottara's spiritual potential, he decided to wait for the right time.



Prajnottara was an accomplished master who taught the Instantaneous Entrance to the Way, according to Mahayana Buddhism. In this approach, a master starts by preparing the disciple through many modes of training. When the disciple is finally ready, the master through individualized instructions points out the unborn and empty nature of everything. Having acquired the view of the space-like nature the disciple trains by resting in that view.

This lineage started when Buddha Sakyamuni showed a lotus flower in an assembly of disciples. In the assembly, it was only Mahakashyapa who realized the meaning behind this symbolic indication and a smile broke out on his face. Further the Buddha acknowledged Mahakashyapa's realization. This lineage continued with Ananda, the Buddha's close disciple, receiving the transmission from Mahakashyapa. Further the lineage passed on through many great masters such as Upagupta, Ashvaghosha, Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, etc. All of these masters were also great scholars and Siddhas and wrote many important treatises on the Mahayana philosophy and practice. Prajnottara was the 27th Master of this lineage.

When Bodhyottara's father passed away, everyone was in mourning. Bodhyottara remained in meditation for seven days. After rising from meditation, he decided to dedicate his life to Dharma. He went to Prajnottara and requested to be accepted as his disciple. Prajnottara, realizing that the time was ripe, accepted him under his fold and imparted all the necessary teachings to him. Under the guidance of Prajnottara, Bodhyottara awakened to Bodhi. Then, Prajnottara gave him the name Bodhidharmottara (pronounced as Bodhidharmatara in Chinese sources), or in short Bodhidharma. He became the 28th Master in that unbroken lineage of realized masters.

Bodhidharma also mastered Medicine (Ayurveda, Siddha-medicine), *Marma kala* (similar to acupressure) and martial arts as part of his training. Buddhist Siddha tradition in South India has always been closely connected with healing and marma kala. For instance, Nagarjuna and Aryadeva were also masters of Medicine.

## The Silence of the Thunder

Prajnottara instructed Bodhidharma to go to China and impart the teachings of the Buddha there. Accordingly, Bodhidharma traveled to China by taking the sea route. By this time, Buddhism was already thriving well in China. Most of the Buddhist literature was already translated into Chinese. People had great faith and were pious. Many Buddhist masters from India used to visit China to teach and people there were eagerly looking forward to these visits. Many Chinese also used to visit India for pilgrimage and for deeper learning of Buddhism. It was into this China, a flourishing centre of Buddhism that Bodhidharma arrived.



**Bodhidharma (Daruma) – a 15th Century painting.**

Upon his arrival, Bodhidharma felt that people were getting lost in the conventionalities around Buddhism without getting into the essence of it. For example, though people were highly fascinated about making a lot of merit through virtuous deeds such as generosity, building temples and stupas, chanting , etc., they missed to look into their own minds and tame it. By losing this crux, even great merit making activities turned into just worldly dharma. Perhaps for this reason Bodhidharma strongly emphasized in his teachings there, the sudden realization method of settling into the nature of one's own mind. Many of the anecdotes on Bodhidharma are narrations about how he shocked his disciples to break them away from their clinging to worldly dharma.

Immediately upon landing in China, he was invited to a monastery to deliver a teaching to a large number of people. Reaching the monastery, the Master went to the teaching dais and sat there in meditation. People waited and waited for his wisdom words and the typical ceremonies of a monastic assembly. But the Master just remained there silent like an unmoving mountain. Hours passed by and the air of silence was occasionally broken only when the perplexed whispers of people rose up like that of buzzing bees and settling again into a dense silence of anticipation. The Master remained undisturbed by the whispering winds of people's expectations.

Then one moment, the Master just silently go up and simply walked away. Some wondered whether he was crazy, while some others speculated that there is some mystical meaning behind his silence. Whichever is the case, he succeeded in shocking them. At least a few would have settled and tasted the empty and brilliant expanse of mind in resonance with the Master's intent, while others remained perplexed. And that was the beginning of Bodhidharma's revolutionary journey through China.

After this, Bodhidharma went on to have his famous encounter with Emperor Wu as portrayed earlier.

## The General who Carried His Mind into Monk-hood

After taking leave of Emperor Wu, Bodhidharma went northwards and reached the shores of the Yangtse River. There he came across a pavilion where a large crowd had gathered to hear the teaching of a famous Buddhist monk Shen Guang. Bodhidharma also joined the crowd to hear the lecture. Shen Guang also noticed the Indian monk, Bodhidharma, standing in the crowd. For some statements of Shen Guang, Bodhidharma nodded as if in agreement and for some others he nodded as if in disagreement.

When this continued for a while, Shen Guang started getting irritated. After some time, having lost patience, he took his mala (rosary) of heavy beads and flung hard at Bodhidharma's face. In the force of the strike, two of the Master's teeth fell down and he started bleeding. Shen Guang was taken aback as he didn't expect to go that far. Bodhidharma just smiled and walked away peacefully., as if nothing

happened. This intrigued Shen Guang. He thought that any normal man would immediately react instead of just walking away.

Shen Guang became quite restless. Curiosity bubbles up in him, and he rushes behind Bodhidharma. By the time he arrives at the banks of the Yangtse River, he sees Bodhidharma gently sailing northwards by standing on a single reed that floated on the river. He seems to glide through water as effortlessly like a swan. And, there is an old lady sitting with a bundle of reeds on the bank. Seeing this, Shen Guang follows by quickly grabbing a pair of reeds from her, throwing them on the river and then pushing himself over them. Obviously, the reeds couldn't take his weight and he began to drown. At this time, the old lady took pity on him and pulled him out.



**Shen Guang's Meeting with Bodhidharma in Nanjing.  
Here, Bodhidharma is said to have crossed Yangtse river by standing on a reed.**

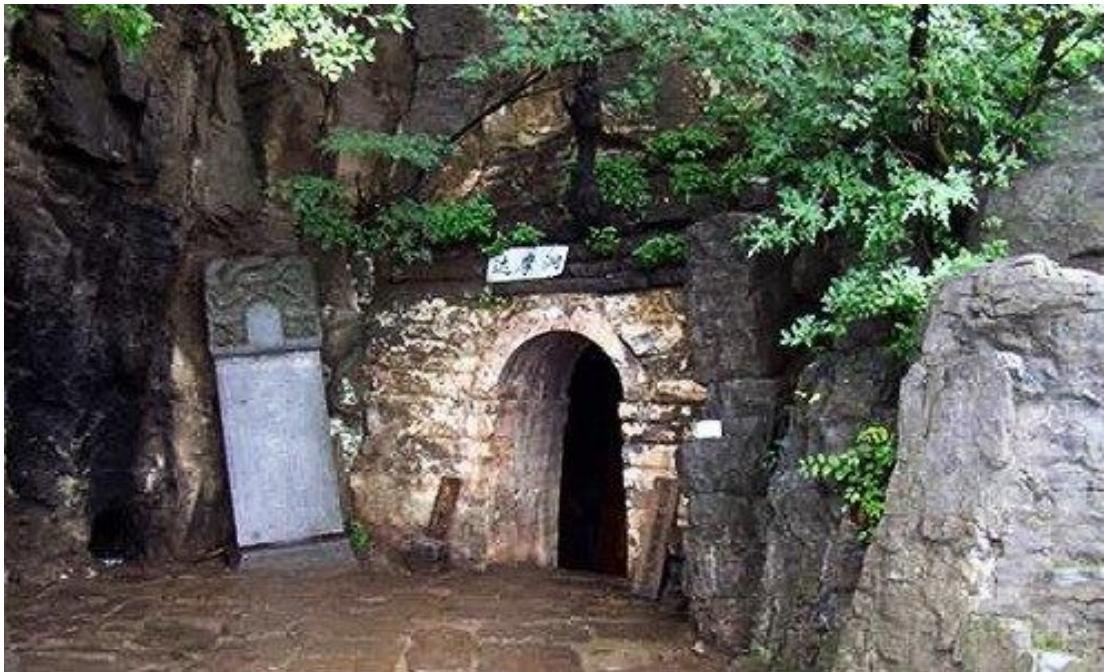
She exclaimed that the man who sails magnificently on that single reed must be a master of great accomplishment. She also told Shen Guang that the Master didn't grab the reeds, but politely requested her for the same. In contrast, this teacher of many words came rushing with an agitated mind, and grabbed the reeds without even asking for permission. In fact, Bodhidharma could easily sail on a single reed by virtue of his mindfulness and his control over inner winds.

Since Shen Guang's mind was already overtaken by aggression and bewilderment, he was deluded to take the effortless sail of Bodhidharma as a cakewalk. Mindlessly, he too pushed himself into the river on a pair of reeds without bothering about what it takes to sail on a reed. Then, he saw how easily he got agitated. He was carrying his agitation all the way from the pavilion till the point

of getting drowned. That too, while he was trying to imbibe the teachings of peace and awakening in others as a Buddhist teacher! Shen Guang was a General in the army before ordaining as a monk. He was still carrying the aggression from his military past. Now, a hunch arose in him that the Master was in fact compassionately pointing out his fault. Then there was a deep yearning for meeting the Master and becoming his disciple. He too embarked upon a journey northwards following the Master.

## The Shaolin Accounts

After crossing the Yangtse River, Bodhidharma journeyed to Shaolin Monastery. Shaolin had already seen some Indian masters before Bodhidharma. Even its first abbot was a master from India with the name Buddhabhadra,. The monks from Shaolin Monastery rejoiced upon Master Bodhidharma's arrival and they warmly welcomed him to the monastery and requested for teaching. But Bodhidharma kept silence and walked up straight to a cave on the hills behind the monastery. He settled down in meditation posture facing a wall in that cave. The ex-General Shen Guang who followed the Master, too waited around the cave pleading for teaching.



**Shaolin Cave where Bodhidharma meditated.**

Seasons passed by. The hill was covered by white snow in winter. The Shaolin monks requested the Master many times to come down to the monastery and be comfortable there. But, Bodhidharma simply remained silent in unmoving meditation. It is said that because of the power of his meditation, his body print got etched in to the wall of the cave. Nine years passed by. Meanwhile Shen Guang kept on requesting for instructions. The locals and monks often visited and venerated the towering yet calming presence of the Master in deep meditation. Yet, the Master remained silent in the Samadhi of the profound view.

Time was not yet ripe to turn the wheel of Dharma. He must have felt that nobody is ready yet to receive his teachings effectively.

Then, it was yet another severe winter. And, Shen Guang was waiting in the snow, day and night. He felt like his merit is not enough to receive the precious teachings from the great Master. Out of desperation he started crying and even his tears were freezing. Images of the great sacrifices made by Bodhisattvas of the past flashed through his mind. Then, he took a sword and chopped off his own hand and swirled it around in the air as an act of supreme offering. The snow turned red, and that was his last act of aggression.

Even though he had noticed his aggression way back on the banks of the Yangtse River, his pursuit for instructions from the Master was also aggressive in nature. He was being aggressive to tame his aggression. It was of the tone, "I, the great monk of many words is the one to now follow and receive pith instructions from the great Master". In his final act of aggression he not only chopped off his arm, but more importantly he chopped off his ego and was ready to receive the teaching.

Then, Bodhidharma calmly came out of the cave and accepted Shen Guang as his disciple.

*Shen Guang beseeched the Master, "My mind has no peace as yet! I beg you, O Master, please put it to rest!"*

*Bodhidharma said, "Bring your mind here and I will pacify it"*

*Shen Guang searched for a while and responded, "I have searched for my mind, and I cannot take hold of it."*

*Bodhidharma exclaimed, "Now your mind is pacified."*

That is how Shen Guang awakened to the empty and peaceful nature of his own mind. This conversation became another famous Koan in Zen/ Chan.



**Bodhidharma is also credited with integrating Buddhist principles in to Kung Fu.  
He made it a suitable support in the path of awakening.**

Bodhidharma then proceeded to the Shaolin Temple and taught there for his remaining years. He bestowed the name Huike to Shen Guang.(Hui-k'o-he means who is capable of wisdom) Huike later became the 29th lineage Master of the Zen/Chan tradition. The other main disciples of Bodhidharma were Dao-fu, Dao-yu, and the nun Zong Chi(Tsung-ch'ih).

Bodhidharma is depicted in the Chinese paintings as wild haired, dark skinned and wide eyed, sporting a beard, with big round earrings and a fierce look. Although the Chinese legends portray him as a Buddhist monk, from his looks he could as well have been a Buddhist mendicant Yogi.

We shall come back to the details of his teachings in the second and third parts of this trilogy.

## Leaving a Footprint in China



**It is said that Bodhidharma was spotted in Timur Mountains after his death. He was holding one shoe, and said that he is returning to India. Later, when his burial chamber was opened, only one shoe was left there.**

Bodhidharma 's last days was in China and he was buried there. There is an interesting account in China associated with his passing away. Years after Bodhidharma's passing away, a Chinese diplomat was traveling in Pamir Mountains. He was away from China for a long time and was not aware of the Master's passing away. In Pamir Mountains he saw the Master walking barefoot holding a shoe. The diplomat paid homage r the Master and the Master told him that he was returning to India.

As the diplomat arrived in China, he was shocked to know that Bodhidharma had already passed away. He went to the emperor and narrated his encounter with Bodhidharma. At first, people thought that he was crazy. However, since he was well known to the emperor, the burial chamber was thereby opened and it was found to be empty except for one shoe! Bodhidharma being a highly realized master, it is possible that his corporeal body dissolved into the luminosity of awareness, like some of the other great masters of the Buddhist Siddha lineage.

The single shoe he left behind is probably indicative of the foot print of his teachings that the Master left in China.



**In this second part of the trilogy on Bodhidharma, let us go deeper into his teachings, including the two methods Bodhidharma taught for entering the Way of Awakening. We shall also see how Bodhidharma's teachings fit within the broader context of various Mahayana methods.**

Bodhidharma taught through silence and words, and through resting and movement. Sometimes he just sat silent and dissolved the conceptual proliferations of seekers in that silence. Sometimes, he used abrupt and loud words and expressions to totally shift the mindset of disciples and to bring to dust their frames of reference. In resting like a mountain, gazing at the empty wall of mind's nature, he showed how the mind of dualities and conceptual proliferations comes to rest in the basic space of the perception and the perceived<sup>1</sup>. In moving like a wild goose spreading its wings, he showed how the perception and the perceived never harm the silence of the basic space.

## The View from the Summit



In the view of awakening, as expressed by the Buddha in the Prajna-paramita-sutras, Lankavatara-sutra, and so on, the perception and the perceived are seen to be unborn, without a beginning. The perception and the perceived have never ever arisen as independent realities separate from the basic space of all phenomenal arising<sup>2</sup>. Realizing this principle cannot be the result of seeking. It is rather like seeing the entire landscape from the top of a high summit by resting and not seeking. All teachings of the Buddha, and particularly Mahayana Sutras, skillfully take disciples to this summit. Bodhidharma's teachings are in essence no different from this.

There are broadly two approaches to arrive at the summit. One is that of the Nalanda masters. It involves elaborate study and then using the sword of prajna (understanding) through logical reasoning and contemplations to cut one's conceptual proliferation branch by branch. As the thoughts that proliferates with dualistic conceptions are gradually eliminated with the sword of prajna, one reaches the summit of non-conceptual view that is beyond seeking. The other approach is that of close master-disciple relationship. In this case, by following the skillful personal instructions of a master, the disciple quickly gains a glimpse into that non-conceptual view by instantaneously cutting through whatever obscured true seeing. Then, the disciple trains to rest at the summit of that non-conceptual view of the basic space, without taking recourse to elaborate reasoning and logic. Bodhidharma emphasized the latter.

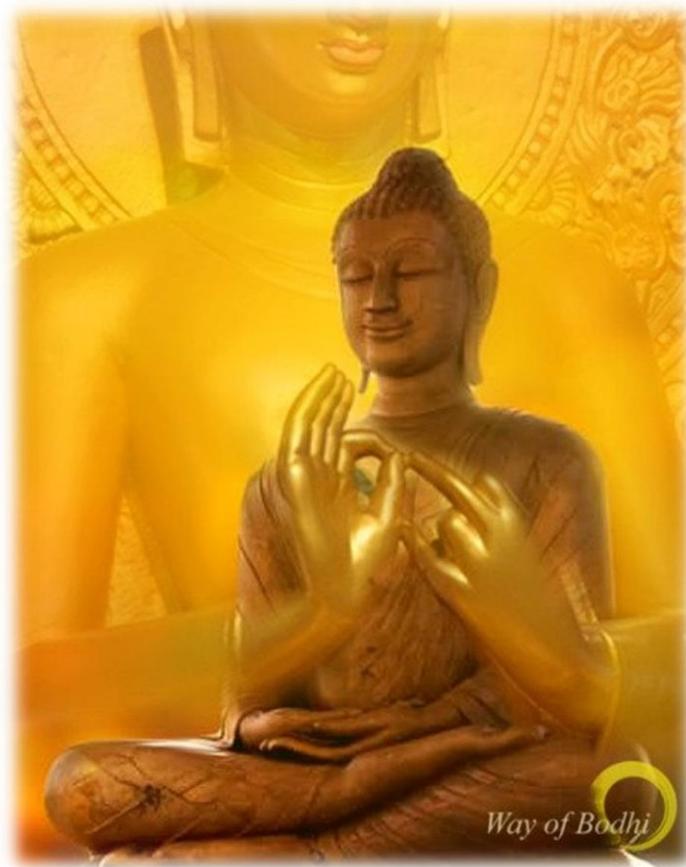
Bodhidharma's teachings, matching with his time, made sure that the skillful means of realizing the vast expanse of one's own mind does not turn into mere religiosity. Buddha-dharma was already very popular by then and people were turning it into religious systems. So, for Bodhidharma, it was important to dismantle the religiosity to show the true meaning of the Buddha's teachings.

He always emphasized that the purpose of practicing Dharma should be to tame and transform mind, and all the more to realize Buddhahood that is in one's nature beyond all seeking and rejecting. He repeatedly made it clear that there is no use doing elaborate practices in a religious way if you miss this real meaning and purpose.

## Finding the Buddha

Bodhidharma said,

To find a Buddha, you have to see your nature.  
Whoever sees one's own nature is a Buddha.  
Invoking Buddhas, reciting Sutras,  
Making offerings, and keeping precepts  
Are all useless if you don't see your nature.  
Invoking Buddhas results in feeling blessed;  
Reciting Sutras results in a good memory;  
Keeping precepts results in a good rebirth;  
And making offering results in good karma;  
Yet, none of those result in finding the Buddha.



To find a Buddha all you have to do is to see your own nature. Your own true nature is no different from that of a fully awakened Buddha. If you don't see your nature, and instead run around all day looking elsewhere, you'll never find a Buddha. In fact, there's nothing to find. There is no Buddha to seek elsewhere. Just

recognize your own innate potential and let it naturally flourish. There, you find the true Buddha. Invoking Buddhas, reciting Sutras, making offerings, keeping precepts and various other such activities are only to create conditions to get closer to that recognition and to make it easier for it to flourish. But, if you go on looking outwardly to see results from such actions without turning attention towards your own mind, then you won't find a Buddha. The best one can gain by performing such acts religiously is some good karma, good memory, good rebirth, and feeling blessed, keeping the hope alive, but never Buddhahood!

Thus Bodhidharma's style was to turn the attention of the disciple inward to the mind, and into its empty nature. The Master leads the disciple into realizing that one's mind by its very nature is equal to that of a fully awakened Buddha. Yet, when one recognizes the nature of one's own mind, nothing is found there to cling to as 'this is mind'. Discovering one's own Buddhahood in the empty-mind is the essence and the way of Mahayana Buddhism.

Bodhidharma said,

You should realize that the cultivation of the Way does not exist apart from your mind. If your mind is pure, everything is pure as buddha-fields. As sutras states, "If the minds of beings are impure, beings are impure. If the minds of beings are pure, beings are pure," and "To reach a buddha-field, purify your mind. As your mind becomes pure, everything becomes pure as buddha-fields." (from the Breakthrough Discourse)

## Dissolving the Mind



Though purifying mind is the essence of practicing the Way, it is not done by clinging at the mind as a glorified and absolute entity. It is not that one simply goes inward by rejecting the external world. It is not that the mind is pure and the world is impure. When mind is clear, the world is a pure-field. When mind is deluded, the world is Samsara. Bodhidharma said,

**Seeing with insight, form is not simply form, because form depends on mind. And, mind is not simply mind, because mind depends on form. Mind and form create and negate each other. ... Mind and the world are opposites, appearances arise where they meet. When your mind does not stir inside, the world does not arise outside. When the world and the mind are both transparent, this is the true insight." (from the Wakeup Discourse)**

Just like the masters of Madhyamaka, Bodhidharma too pointed out that mind and form are interdependently arising. Mind and form create each other. Yet, when you cling to form, you negate mind. And, when you cling to mind, you negate form. Only when such dualistic notions are dissolved, and only when both mind and the world are transparent (not turning to obstructing concepts) the true insight arises.

In this regard, Bodhidharma said,

**Using the mind to look for reality is delusion.  
Not using the mind to look for reality is awareness.  
(from the Wakeup Discourse)**

So, to effectively enter the Way, one has to go beyond the dualities (conceptual constructs) of mind and form. As far as one looks for reality as an object of mind, one is still trapped in the net of delusion (of seeing mind and form as independent realities), never breaking free from it. In that way, one holds reality as something other than oneself, and even worse, one holds oneself as a spectator to a separate reality!

When the mind does not stir anymore and settles into its pristine clarity, the world does not stir outside. The reality is revealed beyond the divisions of Self and others, and mind and form. Thus, as you learn not to use the mind to look for reality and simply rests in the natural state of mind as it is, there is the dawn of pristine awareness – knowing reality as it is, non-dually and non-conceptually.

When the mind does not dissolve in this way to its original clarity, whatever one sees is merely the stirring of conceptuality. Even if we try to construct a Buddha's mind, it only stirs and does not see reality. Because, the Buddha's mind is simply the uncompounded clarity of Bodhi (awakening), free from stirring and constructions. So, Bodhidharma said,

**That which ordinary knowledge understands is also said to be within the boundaries of the norms. When you do not produce the mind of a common man, or the mind of a sravaka or a bodhisattva, and when you do not even produce a**

Buddha-mind or any mind at all, then for the first time you can be said to have gone outside the boundaries of the norms. If no mind at all arises, and if you do not produce understanding nor give rise to delusion, then, for the first time, you can be said to have gone outside of everything. (From the Record #1, of the Collection of Bodhidharma's Works<sup>3</sup> retrieved from Dunhuang Caves)

Often, this approach of simply not using mind and the instruction to rest naturally, are confused with simply sitting in tranquility or Shamatha. Particularly, those who did not obtain the direct and clear instructions confuse so. Then, though they keep meditating, they do not enter the Way. However, if one understands Bodhidharma's approach properly, it is not about holding mind in a passive state. His Way is a union of Shamatha (pacification of mind) and Vipashyana (cultivating insight). For example, Bodhidharma gave the following instructions regarding how to work with the mind that arises,

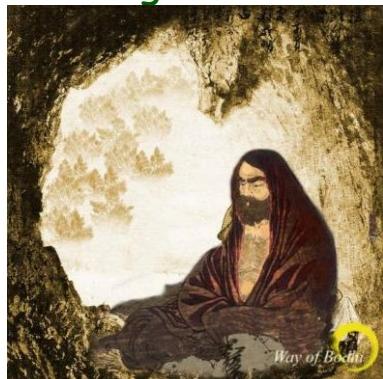
**When mind arises, rely on teachings to watch the source where it arises from. If mind discriminates, rely on teachings to watch the source of discrimination. If attachment, anger or deluded thoughts arise, rely on teachings to watch the source they arise from. [When nothing arises,] not seeking for their arisings is cultivating the Way. When there is arising of thought, then investigate, and by relying on teachings, clear it up!(From the Record #1, of the Collection of Bodhidharma's Works retried from Dunhuang Caves)**

As it is evident from the above, Bodhidharma's approach of dissolving mind is through insight, and not that of holding mind in a passive state. Various states of meditation attained through simply pacifying mind into various states of absorption (dhyana) are merely temporary and do not lead to real insight and liberation. Whereas, when the dualistic mind is dissolved through insight, and then by simply resting in that insight, there is the view of reality, and thus liberation.

Thus, Bodhidharma clarified,

**Not creating delusion is enlightenment.  
Not engaging in ignorance is wisdom  
No affliction is Nirvana.  
(from the Wakeup Discourse)**

## Breaking the Silence



Bodhidharma kept silence for many years and stayed in a Samadhi of clear insight. He said,

### Freeing oneself from words is liberation. (from the Wakeup Discourse)

The words, even when not spoken out, are proliferations of a conceptual and dualistic mind. To dissolve mind, it is important to free oneself from such proliferations and be able to rest naturally. Yet, he cautioned that a dumb kind of silence should not be confused as the Way. So, in the same discourse, he mocked those who glorify the silence of stupidity,

Those who understand both speech and silence are in Samadhi. If you speak when you know, your speech is free. If you are silent when you don't know, your silence is bondage. If your speech is not attached to appearances, it is free. If your silence is attached to appearances, it is bondage. Language by itself is not bondage. Because, language by itself is not attachment. And, attachment has nothing to do with language. (from the Wakeup Discourse)

Clearly, it does not matter whether you speak or keep silence as far as either of it is from a point of wisdom and understanding. And, even the silence can be bondage if there is attachment and the lack of insight. In fact, the depth of inner silence of realization can pervade every spoken word. Then, words transcend silence and stirring.

### The Two Ways to Enter the Way



Bodhidharma (Daruma) – a 15th Century painting.

Bodhidharma's approach to the Way can be classified into two methods. In one of his famed teachings in China, he spoke of these two kinds of entry to the Way. They are,

1. Entering the Way through Insight - The instantaneous Entrance to the Way
2. Entering the Way through Practice - The Gradual Entrance to the Way

## Entering the Way through Insight

Entering the Way through insight happens when a disciple of high caliber listens to the instructions of the master, and then leaving behind all deluded pursuits, directly gains insight into the empty nature of mind. Then without making distinction between self and others, one maintains a stable and clear mind like a wall. This is the instantaneous entrance to the Way that Bodhidharma is most well known for. Relaxing in the stable and clear nature of the empty mind is the meditation that is unmoving like a wall. Unmoving does not mean that the mind is lost in vacuity with no thought and perception at all. It also does not mean that one is just sitting all the time. It is not that kind of unmoving. Even while various perceptions and experiences arise, one remains unmoving from the insight of the empty nature of mind and evenness of knowing that all beings possess Buddha-nature. As Bodhidharma said,

**To transcend motion and stillness is the highest meditation. (from the Wakeup Sermon)**

In this way, Bodhidharma's approach is not that of just remaining still in body and mind, but that of meditation transcending motion and stillness. It is about maintaining unmoving realization of the reality throughout all actions of life, or simply, 'unmoving meditation in action'.



Zen Master Dogen

The sitting meditation of Bodhidharma is also known as 'Wall-gazing Meditation' (*Pi-kuan* in Chinese). Though in certain traditions of Chan/Zen, it is practiced by facing a wall, its meaning is not limited to simply gazing at the wall. In this, one trains to abandon all conceptuality and relax in the utter clarity of mind. As a poetic expression, it is like directly 'gazing' into the empty wall of the mind's nature. However, in practice there is nothing to gaze as the nature of mind transcends object-subject dualities. So one simply relaxes in the natural clarity of mind.

Often, Bodhidharma's approach of entering the Way through insight is confused with purely sitting meditation, devoid of everything else. In fact, his tradition got the name Zen School or Chan School (which literally means Meditation School) because ordinary people confused this to be just always sitting in meditation. As Dogen, a later master of Zen and the founder of Soto School of Zen in Japan pointed out in his *Bendowa*,

At first, while Master Bodhidharma sat facing the wall for nine years ..., both monks and non-monastics ... called him the sage who just practiced zazen (sitting meditation) as the essence. After that, his successors for generations practiced zazen. Seeing this, foolish worldly people, who did not understand what goes on in the sitting, in confusion [of seeing only the outer form] called this the 'Zazen School' (the school of sitting meditation). ... Do not take zazen to be same as the samadhi [of the three trainings of discipline, samadhi and wisdom], or dhyāna (meditation) of the six perfections. [The true zazen practice is what] Tathagata in the assembly at Vulture Peak (Grhakuta Mountain of Rajgir) transmitted to Venerable Mahakashyapa, the unsurpassed great transmission of the wondrous mind of Nirvana, the vision of dharma-eye. ... It is a complete Way of Buddhadharma

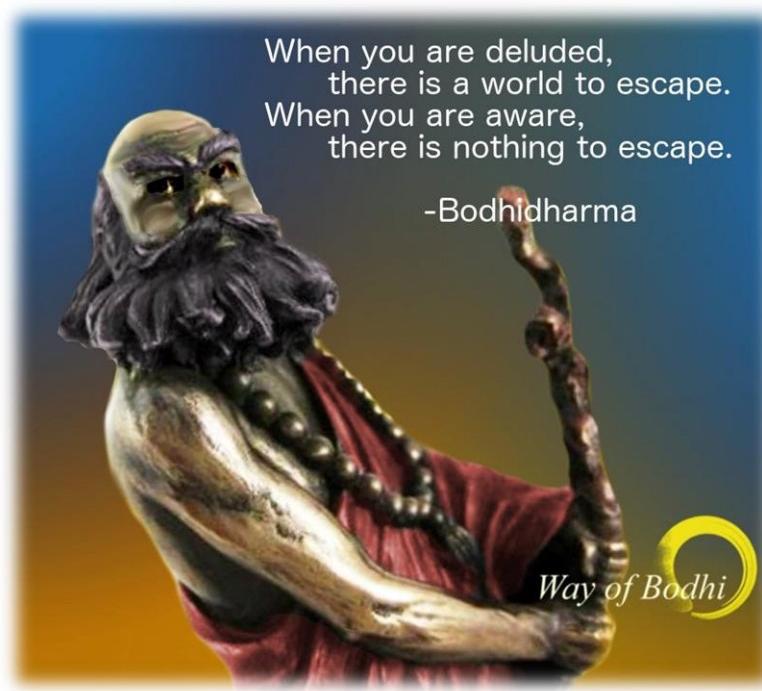
## Entering the Way through Practice

Though the instantaneous approach of entering the Way through insight appears simple, it is difficult to gain instantaneous insight for most people even when a Master guides them to the view. So, Bodhidharma also taught a gradual way of entrance to the Way that is easy for all. This is 'entering the Way through practice'. This has four practices,

1. Accepting Suffering
2. Adapting to Conditions
3. Seeking nothing
4. To unite with the Way

The first step in the gradual way is to learn not to react foolishly to sufferings arising from karmic ripening of past deeds. By reacting negatively, we only add

more fuel to the karmic ripenings. In the face of painful situations that life presents, a skillful practitioner spends his or her energy in creating positive conditions and doing positive deeds rather than lamenting or reacting to painful situations negatively. This brings a first level sanity to life.



The second step is a little more advanced. Adapting to conditions is about realizing that all painful and pleasurable incidents of life are conditional and would also go away as conditions change. A skillful practitioner learns to maintain evenness of mind during both happiness and suffering, without giving into excessive elations and depression. This leads to profound clarity and peace of mind.

The third step is even more advanced. Seeking nothing means that one has already realized a mind of contentment and sees the meaninglessness of all selfish pursuits. In this stage, one even abandons seeking enlightenment. It does not mean that one remains inactive or shies away from action. Rather, one enjoys engaging in heroic pursuits for the benefit of others. (Same as relative bodhicitta.)

As the final stage of the gradual way, the practitioner unites with the Way by seeing the emptiness of Self and all phenomena and by recognizing the empty expanse of the ground of all phenomena.

### Honoring the Words of the Buddha

Though Bodhidharma emphasized the need to go to the essential meaning than merely reading scriptures, he also valued scriptural knowledge. In fact, Bodhidharma held Sutras in high esteem. Particularly he held that Mahayana Lankavatara Sutra contains the essential teachings of the instantaneous realization tradition of Mahayana. When Bodhidharma made Huike his Dharma

successor, along with his robe and bowl he passed on a copy of the scripture of Lankavatara Sutra.

## The Teachings Go further East

Bodhidharma's teachings spread mainly in China and further east in Korea and Japan. His teachings later evolved into the instantaneous tradition of the Southern Chan school of China and the gradual tradition of the Northern Chan school of China. These teachings reached Vietnam through an Indian master named Vinītaruci who was a disciple of the Chinese master Sengcan, who in turn was a disciple of Huīke, the heart disciple of Bodhidharma. In Vietnam this school came to be known as the Thien school. The Chinese Chan school propagated to Japan when Myōan Eisai learnt it in China and established the Rinzai Zen School, following the Chinese tradition of the Linji Chan school. Further, Dōgen learnt from the Chinese tradition of the Caodong Chan school and established the Soto Zen school in Japan. All of these schools practice the meditation of just sitting and resting in the unborn nature of all appearances without seeking or rejecting appearances. The difference among these schools is in the additional supports they use such as Sutra recitation, contemplation on koans (verses, often with seemingly paradoxical meaning, supposed to take the disciple beyond conceptuality), walking meditation, etc.

## Placing in a Broader Context

During the 8th century CE, Bodhidharma's teachings (Chan) reached Tibet from China. And that provides a unique opportunity to review Bodhidharma's teachings in the context of many other Mahayana Buddhist teachings that arrived in Tibet. Tibetan Buddhism had both the pandita methods (those who made thorough scholarly study to enter the Way of awakening) and the kusulu methods (those who just practiced the essence of non-conceptual realization, without much scholarly study). These pandita and kusulu methods blended into an integral whole in Tibet with the same lineages and masters handling both kinds of methods together. Thus, the Tibetan scholars were able to come up with some of the best works of systematizing, contrasting and co-developing various methods of awakening, without denigrating one style for another. Since Chan tradition did not survive in Tibet for long, Bodhidharma's teachings do not occupy a place in the analytical works of later Tibetan scholars. However, during the short period of the Chan presence in Tibet, some important scholarly works were composed that covered Bodhidharma's tradition.

## Nub Sangye Yeshe's Classification of the Four Systems



**Nubchen Sangye Yeshe**

Amongst those were Nubchen Sangye Yeshe's composition of a very important work, with the name Samten Migdron (Lamp to the Eye of Meditation). Nubchen was a direct disciple of Guru Padmasambhava who brought Vajrayana Buddhism from India to Tibet. Nubchen's work analyzed all the traditions of Mahayana Buddhist meditation into four systems with equal respect. This work also helps to distinguish between Chan / Zen and Atiyoga, and to avoid mixing up of the two methods.

Samten Migdron was lost for a long time. A manuscript of this text was recovered in early 20th Century from the Dunhuang caves in China. This became a very helpful source to see how Bodhidharma's teaching style fits within the broader context of Mahayana Buddhism.

Nubchen classified Mahayana Meditation of the union of Shamatha (calm-abiding meditation) and Vipashyana (insight meditation) broadly into four systems. These are

Two methods of Sutrayana

1. **Gradual**
  2. **Instantaneous**
- and the two of Vajrayana

1. Mahayoga (generation and completion stage practices of Mantrayana)
2. Atiyoga (the Great Perfection or Dzogchen practice).

All of these four have their own respective ways of arriving at the union of shamatha and vipashyana on the unborn and empty nature of the basic space of all phenomena, and attaining liberation in that basic space.

According to Nubchen's classification, the Gradual Sutrayana refers to the path of gradually abandoning various conceptual clingings and gradually realizing the unborn and empty nature of the space of all phenomena. Here, one cultivates non-conceptuality with respect to various phenomenal appearances, and that gradually leads to the basic space.

The second system, the Instantaneous Sutrayana, is what Nubchen identifies primarily as the teachings of the Great Abbot Bodhidharma (or Bodhidharma), particularly 'Entering the Way through Insight' (Nubchen also deals with many other masters of Chan / Zen as belonging to this category). According to Nubchen, this method teaches the unborn nature of the space of all phenomena from the very beginning. The practice here is that of wall-gazing as the union of shamatha and vipashyana by training to rest in the unborn ultimate nature. According to Nubchen, this unborn nature is the *parinishpanna svabhāva* (Perfect Nature) of the unborn space as in Yogacara. Here one cultivates non-conceptuality with respect to the emptiness of all phenomena. In other words, one cultivates non-conceptuality with respect to non-appearances<sup>4</sup>, without clinging to a conceptual notion of emptiness.

The third, Mahayoga, refers to the generation and completion stage practices of the Vajrayana. Here, one cultivates the non-dual non-conceptuality of the inseparability of the unborn space and wisdom-appearances.

The fourth, Atiyoga, refers to Great Perfection or Dzogchen. Here, a disciple is directly introduced to the play of his or her pristine awareness that is inseparable from the unborn space of all phenomena. In Atiyoga, one directly rests in the spontaneously present non-conceptuality where there is no reference for meditation, such as the object or subject. In this spontaneously present non-conceptuality, emptiness and appearances are naturally unified.

## Prasangika Madhyamaka and Bodhidharma

In the context of the above analysis, it is also interesting to compare Prasangika Madhyamaka with Bodhidharma's method. Though these two methods of entering the Way differ drastically, the qualities of their meditation are essentially the same.

Prasangika uses consequential reasoning (the logic of reduction-ad-absurdum) to see the absurdity of every possible conceptual elaboration. Here, conceptual elaborations include the views such as existence, non-existence, both and neither. As one studies scriptures and thoroughly analyzes, one gains certainty in the

absurdity of all such conceptual positions. Having gained certainty through such analysis and contemplation, one's mind comes to rest in the uncontrived nature of mind, giving rise to self-arisen wisdom that is in the nature of mind. (Nubchen Sangey Yeshe did not analyze Prasangika as a separate system in Samten Migdron. However, since the Prasangika approach is to cut all extremes of existence, non-existence and so on simultaneously, its meditation is the same as what Nubchen explains for the Instantaneous Sutrayana, namely, that of non-conceptuality of non-appearance.)

Unlike Prasangika, Chan / Zen does not use elaborate logic and reasoning to analyze every possible position. Instead, a disciple in this case relies on the individualized instructions of a realized Master to move from the position where he or she is stuck to the point of gaining glimpse into the view of the unborn nature. The effectiveness of this approach depends on the ability of both the master and the disciple. Though a detailed Madhyamaka style analysis is not performed, some systems of Chan / Zen use riddles (koan). Riddles are chosen by the Master depending upon where the disciple is stuck currently. The real Chan / Zen according to 'Entering the Way through Insight' (Instantaneous Entrance) starts only when gradually the disciple arrives at the gate of having a glimpse of the unborn nature.



In this final part of the trilogy on Bodhidharma, we shall look into the pivotal role played by Bodhidharma in turning martial arts into a fine art of awakening. Through him and other masters of his genre, Indian, Chinese and Sri Lankan martial arts came to share many commonalities and became extensions of inner peace, by deriving inspiration from Buddhist principles. We shall also briefly see how traditional medicine derived inspiration from Buddhism.

## The Enigmatic Bodhidharma

Bodhidharma, the master who stayed in unmoving meditation for nine years in the cave behind the Shaolin Temple, is also well-known as a master of some of the most dynamic forms of martial arts. The synergy between Buddhism and Taoism

in China led to the evolution of one of the finest and effective ways to cultivate a healthy body for a healthy mind. These included the slow-moving forms of dynamic meditation such as Chi-kung (also written as Qigong), and martial arts forms such as Kung-Fu.

Back in the land of Bodhidharma's birth, South India, having long forgotten the heritage of Buddhist monks, yogis and maha-siddhas in the heart land of the old Tamilakam (the present day Tamil Nadu and Kerala), Bodhidharma remains just a vague memory – a Buddhist master, an adept in martial arts and a holder of esoteric knowledge on healing and medicinal herbs, and so on. Mostly, these are fragments of memory re-acquired by those who travelled from South India to China in search of martial arts. Often, people are perplexed about how Buddhism, martial arts and medical knowledge came together in Bodhidharma.

And, in the eastern lands of China, Japan, and so on, where the peaceful sitting tradition of Bodhidharma spread widely as Chan / Zen school of Buddhism, at least some peaceful meditators wonder how the martial arts tradition of Shaolin can find its roots in Bodhidharma, the silent meditator. In other words, they wonder, how Bodhidharma and martial arts are connected.

At the surface, martial arts may even sound contradictory to the path of peace that Buddhism stands for. However, martial arts as practiced by some schools of Buddhism have nothing do with attacking or violence, but are finer methods of inner cultivation. We shall come back to it soon. (It is also to be noted that martial art is not an essential practice of Buddhism, but an optional skillful support used only by some schools of Buddhism – particularly, the slow-moving meditational forms of martial arts).

## Turning Martial Arts into a Dance of Awakening

Bodhidharma was one of the few who became instrumental in a large scale wisdom-exchange between India and China. In this process, there were also exchanges between the martial arts traditions of China, Japan , South India and Sri Lanka<sup>2</sup>. Bodhidharma and other masters of his genre revitalized these martial arts with a deeper meaning by infusing Buddhist principles into them.

Some forms of Chinese martial arts preceded Bodhidharma. The Master gave a new dimension to it by structuring it on Buddhist principles and then teaching the monks of Shaolin on how to use it as a support for their path of awakening. Thus, instead of being a display of aggression and force, the new form of Shaolin Kung Fu turned into a dynamic method for cultivating a peaceful mind, and at the same time a powerful tool of defence. Bodhidharma took the slow-moving forms of Chinese martial arts such as Chi-kung (also written as Qigong), gave it a new foundation based on the Buddhist principles and adapted them into the Buddhist practice. These forms help in maintaining a healthy body for a deeper meditation.



**Painting of martial arts at Shaolin Temple depicting a dark-skinned Indian (possibly Bodhidharma)**

The 18 movements taught by Bodhidharma came to be known as the 'Eighteen Hands of Lohan (Arhat)'. Buddhist Chi-kung can be considered as a creative synthesis that happened in China as there are no equivalent slow-forms known in India. He also authored a text on Chi-kung known as Yijin Jing in Chinese. The new form of Shaolin Kung Fu became widely popular and also inspired similar traditions in Japan. There are paintings in Shaolin temple depicting a dark skinned Indian monk training the light skinned Chinese counter parts.

### **The Lion Meets the Dragon Martial Art Traditions of India and China**

Shaolin Kung Fu shares common Buddhist principles with Kalaripayattu of Kerala in South India (particularly, the Southern form of Kalaripayattu), Silambam of Tamil Nadu in South India and Angampora of Sri Lanka. However, the forms, weapons, etc. used in Kung Fu are at variance with the latter forms. So, it may be inferred that the Indian and Chinese systems have independent origins but evolved later by incorporating the same Buddhist principles, and thus came to possess some commonalities. In contrast, Kalaripayattu and Angampora share much in common even in form and weapons. So, the Indian and Sri Lankan systems share a common origin, and later branched off with local differences. The Buddhist principle in Kalaripayattu and Angampora would have been incorporated at a time before they branched off into different systems.



### Kalaripayattu – Martial art of Kerala

Angampora of Sri Lanka is practiced after paying homage to the Buddha, and their academies have an altar with a Buddha image as the central piece. However, Kalaripayattu of Kerala does not recognize its Buddhist connections currently as Buddhism has been long forgotten there. Modern Kalaris (academies of Kalaripayattu) these days mostly have a lamp, an Om syllable or some divine representations as the central piece in their altars.



### Angampora – Martial art of Sri Lanka.

In case of martial arts, the relation between India and China is most likely mutual in nature. Shaolin monastery had Indian teachers even before Bodhidharma, and Chinese also travelled to India to learn Buddhism. So, there could also be influence

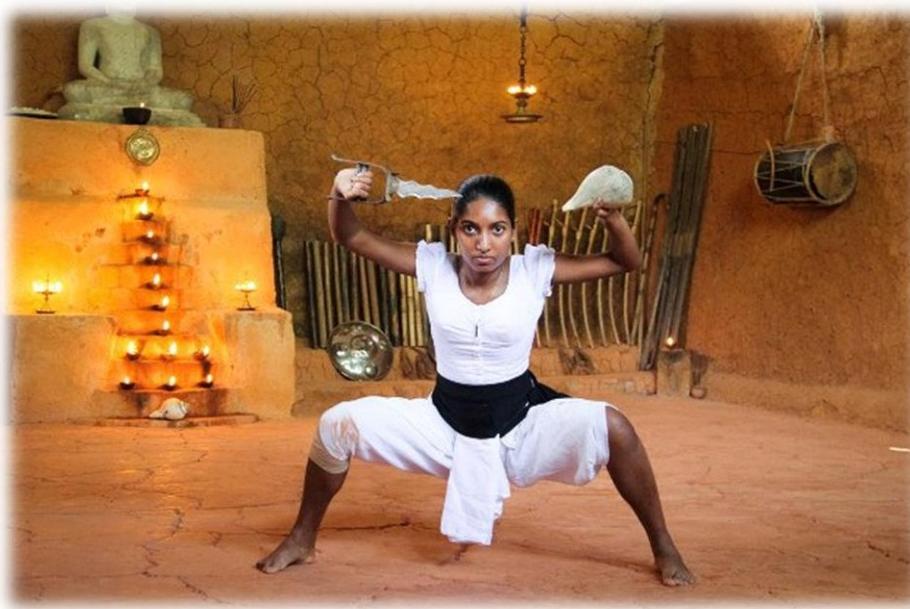
of Chinese Taoist traditions in the Indian and Sri Lankan martial arts coming various masters.

## The Power of Peace the Buddhist Principles in Martial Arts

Let us see some of the principles shared by the martial arts traditions linked together through Bodhidharma. As we have seen earlier, according to Bodhidharma,

**To transcend motion and stillness is the highest meditation.**

Bodhidharma's martial arts are also founded on this principle. Movements in these martial arts are a fine display of inner stillness and ease, expressed as mindful and vigilant actions. No matter whether one is training in a solo form or training with an opponent, the martial arts performance proceeds without losing the inner ease for a moment. A move is never supposed to be the result of mental agitation or fear. At the same time, the peace should never give way into slumber and mental sinking. Thus, one maintains a peaceful, yet vibrantly vigilant awareness all through the martial arts performance. This is also how one is supposed to deal with all aspects of the worldly life in the Way of awakening.



**Angampora – The martial art from Sri Lanka.**

Further, Bodhidharma's martial arts also have a strong basis on four foundations of mindfulness. The practice of the four foundations of mindfulness that the Buddha taught is about being attentive to the stillness and movement of body, feelings, thoughts and phenomenal appearances. One attends to these with mindfulness, vigilance and ardency, while taking care not to slip into covetousness or hatred with respect to whatever arises. Gaining proficiency in these principles of mindfulness is the key to mastery in these martial arts too.

The Buddha taught that confused and effortful reactions to Samsara exhaust us and enslave us more and more in Samsara. Applying this principle to martial arts, one remains mindful not to apply careless and unnecessary force to either the opponent or even to one's own muscles and joints. Thus, one remains perfectly relaxed and free from tightness while facing an opponent (just in the same way as how one is supposed to face any adversity in life). The Buddha taught that one should train one's awareness by maintaining it neither too loose nor too tight. He used the simile of playing a string instrument. For the perfect music to play out, the string should neither be tight nor be loose.

It does not end there. In Mahayana, the Buddha taught that skillfully working with the power of Samsara itself is the way to end Samsara. In the same way, in Bodhidharma's martial arts, one skillfully works with the force and strikes of the opponent himself to defeat the opponent. Thus, these martial arts forms teach the principle of yielding. One deflects the force of the opponent through skillfully maneuvering one's body, and at the right occasion turning the opponent's force towards his own defeat. This is again, in the same way as the Buddha teaching on how one's own destructive emotions can be skillfully dealt with and defeated by their own power.

Though these principles are common to Kung Fu, Kalaripayattu and Angompura (and possibly to Silambam), nowadays it is rare to find practitioners of these martial arts who bring these principles of inner cultivation into their practice.

### **Wild Leaps in Training the Mind Martial Art Forms in the Buddhist Practice**

We have seen how martial art forms progressed with the incorporation of Buddhist principles. Now, let us see how Bodhidharma used them in teaching the Way of awakening. In particular, he used them in the Way of Gradual Entrance .



**Shaolin Kung Fu**

As it is obvious, a peaceful martial art form is also one of the ways in which the sitting practice of mindfulness can be extended into a dynamic practice of movement – so as to extend mindfulness and peace into all post-meditation actions. Further, the cultivation of endurance, stability and suppleness, such as through the horse stance of Chinese martial arts, also helps in cultivating the first practice of the entrance to the Way, namely that of ‘accepting suffering’, by not being shaken by difficulties.

While taking hardship in the martial arts training leads to the cultivation of strong body and mind, taking hardship in the wisdom training of Buddhism leads to the cultivation of wisdom awareness and the strength not to be fooled by the ways of Samsara.

Taking that forward, not reacting blindly to the moves of the opponent and not losing control through opponent’s surprise moves, are helpful in cultivating the second practice, namely that of ‘adapting to condition’ and cultivating great evenness. In this way, one can learn how not to succumb to emotional turbulence and keep the lamp of inner wisdom glow steadily.



### Silambam – Martial arts of Tamil Nadu

Being a courageous warrior who mindfully performs the right moves without falling into hopes and fears, is also how a Bodhisattva warrior enters the Way (of awakening), seeking nothing, and selflessly acting for others. And, that is the third practice of the entrance to the Way. A Bodhisattva is often compared to a courageous warrior, in that a Bodhisattva dedicates his life to the benefit of other beings without bias, and then does every moment’s action just for that sake – without worrying about protecting self or getting into convoluted plans.

So far we have seen how Bodhidharma and martial arts are connected, and how he turned martial arts into a play of awakening. Finally, we shall also briefly see how Bodhidharma is connected with healing and traditional medicine.

## The Healing Touch Connection with Healing and Medicine

Bodhidharma and other masters like him were also instrumental in forging another deep connection between the Buddhist Siddhas of South India and Sri Lanka, and the Taoist and Buddhist masters of China. The martial art traditions of these regions also share a common knowledge of the key-points of the body that can be used for both self-defense and healing. Working with these acupressure points is known in Kerala as Marma-kala, in Tamil Nadu as Varma-kalai and in Sri Lanka as Maru-kala. The Chinese have a much more elaborate system of acupressure points that is well preserved even today. Chi-kung practice also has its own elaborate healing system.

The Buddhist masters through their mindfulness practice of the body could study the effect in the body produced by various herbs and minerals as well as various emotional states. Thus, they could figure out details about how herbs, meditation and exercise methods can be utilized systematically in maintaining the balance of a healthy body and mind. As a result, in India, they contributed to the development and systematization of Medical systems such as Ayurveda and the South Indian Siddha Medicine. (As it may be noted, even before Bodhidharma, the Buddhist scholar and mahasiddha [Nagarjuna](#) was an adept in Ayurveda. Also, the much acclaimed Ashtangahrdayam, the standard manual of Ayurveda, was a composition by a Buddhist master named Vaghbata.)

As masters such as Bodhidharma travelled to China and as Chinese came to India in search of Buddhism, there were also widespread mutual exchanges of their medical knowledge. Particularly, the South Indian Siddha medical system and the Chinese medical system came to share many common principles due to these exchanges.

## Concluding Remarks

Through this three-part series, we have tried to paint a picture of the life and teachings of Bodhidharma, and thus bring some light into the enigmatic accounts of Bodhidharma.

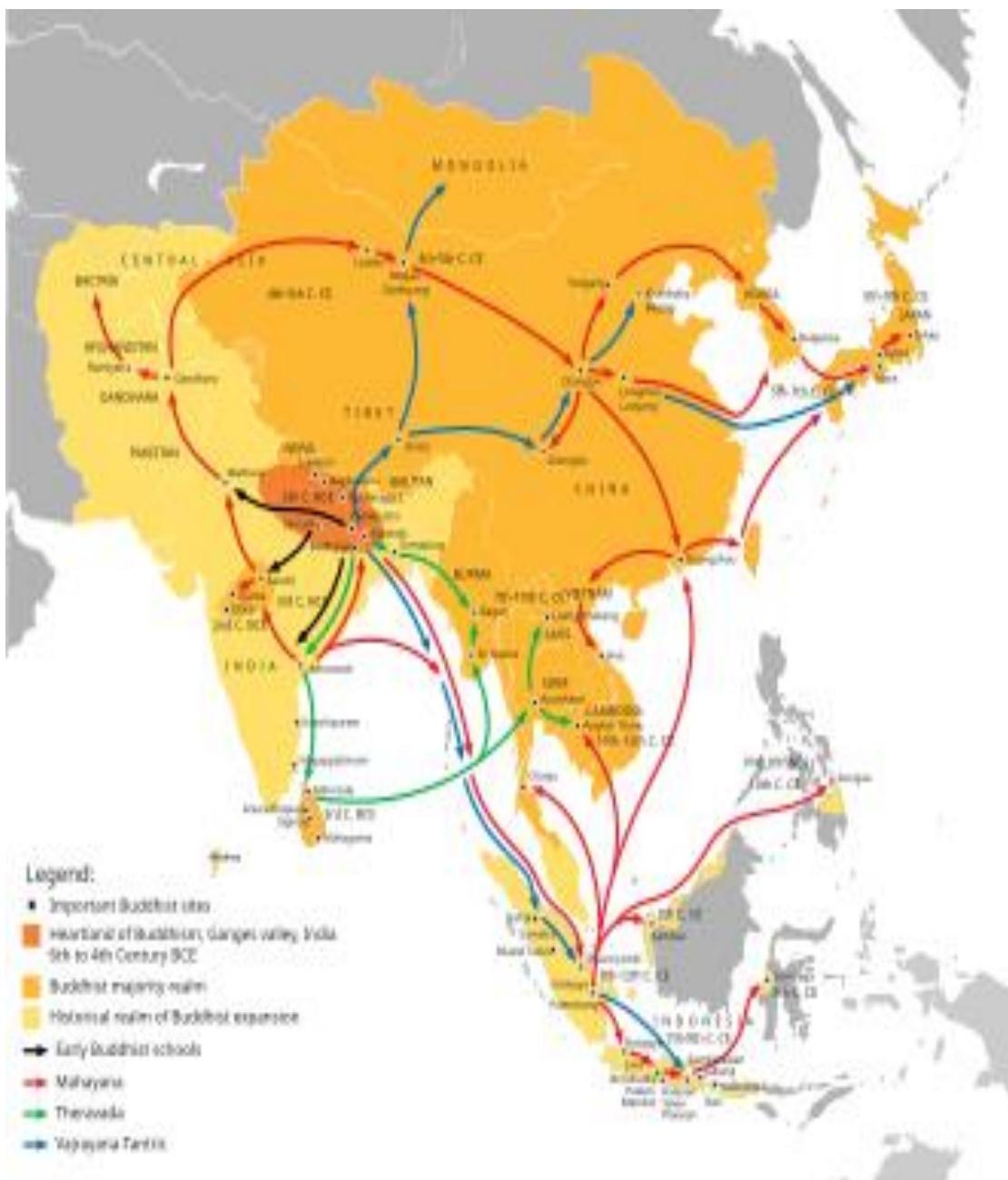
The Buddha showed a path beyond religion that showed the original simplicity and perfection of mind (see, give link to path beyond religion). In spite of that, due to the general habits of humanity, religiosity crepted into even various Buddhist systems from time to time. However, the open culture of Buddhism paved way for many visionary masters who could again step beyond such religiosity and bring

the focus back to the essence of realizing one's own nature. Bodhidharma was such a revolutionary master who dispelled religiosity and drove disciples straight into the essence of Buddhism. As an example of how every walk of life can be turned into a Way of Bodhi (awakening), he showed how even martial arts can be turned into a meaningful and peaceful activity, a wild leap of awakening.



## SILK ROAD TRANSMISSION OF BUDDHISM

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk\\_Road\\_transmission\\_of\\_Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_Road_transmission_of_Buddhism)



Buddhist expansion in Asia: Mahāyāna Buddhism first entered the Chinese Empire (Han dynasty) through Silk Road during the Kushan Era.  
The overland and maritime "Silk Roads" were interlinked and complementary, forming what scholars have called the "great circle of Buddhism".

Mahāyāna Buddhism entered Han China via the Silk Road, beginning in the 1st or 2nd century CE. The first documented translation efforts by Buddhist monks in China were in the 2nd century CE via the Kushan Empire into the Chinese territory bordering the Tarim Basin under Kanishka. These contacts transmitted strands of Sarvastivadan and Tamrashatiya Buddhism throughout the Eastern world.

Theravada Buddhism developed from the Pāli Canon in Sri Lanka Tamrashatiya school and spread throughout Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, Sarvastivada Buddhism was transmitted from North India through Central Asia to China. Direct contact between Central Asian and Chinese Buddhism continued throughout the 3rd to 7th centuries, much into the Tang period. From the 4th century onward, Chinese pilgrims like Faxian (395-414) and later Xuanzang (629-644) started to travel to northern India in order to get improved access to original scriptures. Between the 3rd and 7th centuries, parts of the land route connecting northern India with China was ruled by the Xiongnu, Han dynasty, Kushan Empire, the Hephthalite Empire, the Göktsürks, and the Tang dynasty. The Indian form of Buddhist tantra (Vajrayana) reached China in the 7th century. Tibetan Buddhism was likewise established as a branch of Vajrayana, in the 8th century.

But from about this time, the Silk road trade of Buddhism began to decline with the Muslim conquest of Transoxiana (e.g. Battle of Talas), resulting in the Uyghur Khaganate by the 740s.<sup>[10]</sup> Indian Buddhism declined due to the resurgence of Hinduism and the Muslim conquest of India. Tang-era Chinese Buddhism was briefly repressed in the 9th century (but made a comeback in later dynasties). The Western Liao was a Buddhist Sinitic dynasty based in Central Asia, before Mongol invasion of Central Asia. The Mongol Empire resulted in the further Islamization of Central Asia. They embraced Tibetan Buddhism starting with the Yuan dynasty (Buddhism in Mongolia). The other khanates, the Ilkhanate, Chagatai Khanate, and Golden Horde eventually converted to Islam (Religion in the Mongol Empire#Islam).

Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, Taiwanese and Southeast Asian traditions of Buddhism continued. As of 2019, China by far had

the largest population of Buddhists in the world at nearly 250 million; [Thailand](#) comes second at around 70 million.

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**Blue-eyed Central Asian monk teaching East-Asian monk. A fresco from the Bezeklik Thousand Buddha Caves, dated to the 9th century; although Albert von Le Coq (1913) assumed the blue-eyed, red-haired monk was a Tocharian, modern scholarship has identified similar Caucasian figures of the same cave temple (No. 9) as ethnic Sogdians, an Eastern Iranian people who inhabited Turfan as an ethnic minority community during the phases of Tang Chinese (7th–8th century) and Uyghur rule (9th–13th century).**

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ISBN 978-81-984404-1-9

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